(b) if so, the name of such institute and the reasons for giving preference to the above institute for such responsibility; and

(c) by when the wasteland is targeted to be made cultivable together with the area of the same?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT (SHRI ANNASAHEB M.K. PATIL): (a) No, Sir. (b) Question does not arise.

(c) As per Wastelands Atlas of India 2000 (brought out by the Department of Land Resources in collaboration with National Remote Sensing Agency, Hyderabad employing Satellite Remote Sensing Technologies), the total extent of wastelands in the country is 63.85 m. ha. Wastelands are degraded lands, which are currently under-utilized and are deteriorating for lack of appropriate water and soil management or on account of natural causes. Therefore, agricultural operations are generally not feasible on such lands at the first stage of development. The Department of Land Resources has the mandate to develop wastelands rather than to convert wastelands into cultivable lands. It is implementing three major Schemes *viz.* the Integrated Wastelands Development Programme (IWDP), the Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP) and the Desert Development Programme (DDP) for development of wastelands/degraded lands on watershed basis *w.e.f.* 1.4.1995. New projects covering 139.73 lac hectares have been taken up under these Schemes from 1.4.95 to 31.3.2002.

Issuance of BPL cards to the poor

4498. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of RURAL DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that poorest of the poor in all villages have been issued the BPL Cards;

(b.) if so, whether it is also a fact that several BPL Card Holders belong to creamy layers and BPL; and

(c) the action proposed for proper audit to ensure issue of BPL Cards to all needy?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT (SHRI SUBHASH MAHARIA): (a) to (c) Ministry of

Rural Development have not issued any instructions to issue Below Poverty Line (BPL) Cards to the Households identified as BPL. However, under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana, implemented by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, instructions have been issued to the State Governments and Union Territories to provide distinctive Ration Cards (to be known as "Antyodaya Ration Cards") to the poorest of the poor families, identified for extending benefits.

Instructions have been issued to the State Govemment/UT Administrations for identification of the beneficiaries under this Scheme and to ensure that the beneficiaries are the poorest of the poor families and are selected in a transparent manner, as the list of beneficiaries is to be approved by the Gram Sabha.

Irregularities in rural projects

4499. SHRI CHO S. RAMASWAMY: Will the Minister of RURAL DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that a lot of irregularities have been detected in the implementation of many rural projects across the country;

(b) if so, the details of such irregularities, State-wise;

(c) what stringent measures are being contemplated against such defaulting States; and

(d) what steps are being taken to monitor such rural projects till the completion of such projects?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT (SHRI SUBHASH MAHARIA): (a) and (b) The irregularities which have come to notice in respect of some of the Rural Development Programmes include misappropriation/diversion of funds for the Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) and the Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY) in various States and Union Territories. In regard to the Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY), irregularities in, *inter-alia,* the selection of beneficiaries were reported in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Nagaland, Orissa, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, alleged involvement of Sarpanches/Panchayat Secretaries in the purchase of construction materials and construction of IAY houses in Punjab and relating to implementation of the Desert Development Programme (DDP) in Rajasthan.